

COVID cases spike even as U.S. hits 200M vaccine milestone

By SOPHIA TAREEN and
JENNIFER McDERMOTT
Associated Press

PROVIDENCE, R.I. (AP) — The number of Americans fully vaccinated against COVID-19 reached 200 million Wednesday amid a dispiriting holiday-season spike in cases and hospitalizations that has hit even New England, one of the most highly inoculated corners of the country. New cases in the U.S. climbed from an average of nearly 95,000 a day on Nov. 22 to almost 119,000 a day this week, and hospitalizations are up 25% from a month ago. The increases are due almost entirely to the delta variant, though the omicron mutation has been detected in about 20 states and is sure to spread even more.

Deaths are running close to 1,600 a day on average, back up to where they were in October. And the overall U.S. death toll less than two years into the crisis could hit another heartbreaking milestone, 800,000, in a matter of days. The situation is not as dire as last year's holiday-season surge, before the public had access to COVID-19 vaccines, but the 60% of the U.S. population that is fully vaccinated has not been enough to prevent hot spots. The cold weather, Thanksgiving gatherings and a big rebound in holiday travel are all believed to be playing a role, along with public weariness with pandemic restrictions.

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Leanna Arcila, 7, is licked by Watson, a therapy dog with the Pawtucket police department, as she receives her COVID-19 vaccination from Dr. Eugenio Fernandez at Nathanael Greene Elementary School in Pawtucket, R.I., Tuesday, Dec. 7, 2021.

Associated Press

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Continued from Front

Lawrence Gostin, director of the WHO Collaborating Center on Public Health Law and Human Rights at Georgetown University, likened the virus to a wildfire. "You can clear a forest of the shrubbery. But if you leave some shrubs and trees standing, the fire will find them," Gostin said. "The virus will find you. It is searching for hosts that are not immune. The fact that you live in New England or New York doesn't insulate you."

Demand for the vaccine — with recent approval of boosters for all adults and shots for elementary school children — has been high amid the surge and the emergence of the omicron variant, whose dangers are still not fully understood. On Wednesday, Pfizer said that the initial two shots of its vaccine appear significantly less effective against omicron but that a booster dose may offer important protection.

Nearly 48 million people have received a booster, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. White House officials noted the U.S. administered 12.5 million shots last week, the highest weekly total since May.

"And that's critical progress as we head into the winter and confront the new omicron variant," White House coronavirus adviser Jeffrey Zients said.

At the same time, some states, notably in highly



Maya Goode, a COVID-19 technician, performs a test as others wait their turn outside Asthenis Pharmacy in Providence, R.I., Tuesday, Dec. 7, 2021.

vaccinated New England, but also in the Midwest, are grappling with some of the worst surges since the start of the pandemic. Hospitals are filling up and reacting by canceling non-urgent surgeries or taking other crisis measures, while states are strongly promoting boosters.

Despite one of the highest vaccination levels in the country — over 74% of the population fully vaccinated — Vermont is coping with its biggest surge yet. In the last week, new cases per day are up 54%, and the number of people in the hospital with COVID-19 has climbed 18%.

The virus is preying on those who haven't gotten their

shots: As of Tuesday, 90% of the COVID-19 patients in intensive care were unvaccinated.

"Obviously, it's not where we want to be," Gov. Phil Scott said Tuesday, calling the situation "extremely frustrating."

More than 400 people were in the hospital with COVID-19 in New Hampshire at the start of the week, breaking the record set last winter.

New Hampshire Gov. Chris Sununu directed hospitals to set up COVID-19 "surge centers" using space normally reserved for such things as outpatient care.

"Every day for the next several weeks, we're likely to see a new high in CO-

VID hospitalizations in New Hampshire," said Steve Ahnen, president of the New Hampshire Hospital Association. "With over 1,000 new cases a day, that number's not going to do anything but continue to go up."

Maine likewise is struggling with record-breaking COVID-19 hospitalizations. Gov. Janet Mills on Wednesday activated as many as 75 members of the National Guard to help out.

"The vast majority of patients in our hospitals are unvaccinated. That's especially true of critical care patients," said Andy Mueller, CEO of MainHealth, the state's biggest health network. "It requires a tremendous amount of our

resources to provide care." Rhode Island's largest hospital system, Lifespan, said staffing shortages are at never-before-seen crisis levels, while Kent Hospital said it is near capacity and is considering delaying non-urgent procedures.

Dr. Paari Gopalakrishnan, Kent's interim president and chief operating officer, said the spike is probably due to "people letting their guards down" during the holidays, and flu season could complicate things further.

New Hampshire plans to hold a "booster blitz" on Saturday at 15 locations. Most appointments were booked.

In Berlin, Vermont, Mike Labounty got his booster Tuesday.

"I have friends that are in their 20s that are getting sick and friends that are 60 that are getting sick," he said. "The thing you see on Facebook and stuff like that is, 'I just want this to be over. I'm very sick,' so I'm just trying to avoid that."

Elsewhere around the country, Indiana has seen COVID-19 hospital admissions double in the last month and is approaching levels not seen since this time a year ago, before vaccines were widely available. The number of people in intensive care in Minnesota has reached the highest level yet during the pandemic, with 98% of ICU beds occupied. Teams of military medics have been sent into Michigan and New Mexico. □

Jump in counties required to provide language help to voters



A sign is posted outside an election site in the Borough Park section of the Brooklyn borough of New York, Nov. 4, 2014.

Associated Press

By MIKE SCHNEIDER

The number of people in

counties requiring elections officials to provide voting materials in languages other than English jumped by almost a quarter over the past five years, reflecting the increasingly diverse electorate in the U.S., according to figures released Wednesday by the Census Bureau.

More than 24.2 million people live in 331 counties and other jurisdictions requiring the language assistance under the federal Voting Rights Act, a jump from 19.8 million in 2016, the last time the list was updated.

The law requires the juris-

dictions to provide the language assistance to voters if more than 5% of voting-age citizens come from a single-language minority group and they don't speak English sufficiently to participate in the electoral process. Jurisdictions also fall into the category if more than 10,000 voting-age citizens speak a single language other than English and the rate of people who haven't completed fifth grade is higher than the national rate.

The overwhelmingly majority of residents in these jurisdictions require Spanish lan-

guage assistance. Among the other languages in which voting materials are required, depending on the jurisdiction, are Cambodian, Chinese, Filipino, Hindi, Korean, Vietnamese, as well as several American Indian and Alaskan Native languages.

Three states — California, Florida and Texas — are under the requirement, though counties in these states can opt out if they are below the 5% threshold. The new list reflects the increasing diversity of some U.S. counties and other jurisdictions. □

Federal judge to decide if transgender athlete case is moot

BOISE, Idaho (AP) — An Idaho woman says her lawsuit challenging the state's ban on transgender athletes should continue moving through the court system because she is enrolled as a student at Boise State University and plans to play soccer on the school's club team next spring.

Idaho passed the nation's first transgender sports ban last year, barring transgender women from playing on women's sports teams sponsored by public schools, colleges and universities. The law, dubbed House Bill 500 in court filings, doesn't affect transgender men playing on men's sports teams.

After Idaho's legislation was enacted, several other states attempted to follow suit, with lawmakers in more than 20 states proposing similar legislation. Nine states — Idaho, Montana, South Dakota, Texas, Arkansas, Mississippi, Tennessee, Alabama, Florida and West Virginia — have passed some version of a law or executive order to ban or limit transgender students from participating



The Idaho State Capitol in Boise, Idaho, is seen on June 13, 2019.

in school sports. Court cases challenging the law are underway in at least four of those states.

In Idaho, the American Civil Liberties Union and Legal Voice, a women's rights group, sued in federal court on behalf of Lindsay Hecox, a transgender woman and track athlete who hoped to run for Boise State University. An unnamed Boise-area

high school athlete who is a cisgender woman is also a plaintiff in the case because she fears she could be forced to undergo invasive tests to prove her biological sex if someone questions her gender.

The women contend the law violates the 14th Amendment's Equal Protection Clause because it is discriminatory and the

Fourth Amendment's protections against invasion of privacy because of tests required should an athlete's gender be challenged.

In August 2020, U.S. District Judge David Nye stopped the law from taking effect while the lawsuit moved forward, saying Hecox and the other student were likely to succeed in proving the law was unconstitutional.

But attorneys representing Idaho officials and the Alliance Defending Freedom, a conservative Christian group that intervened, appealed the ruling to the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals.

Earlier this year, the 9th Circuit bounced the case back to the federal court in Idaho so a judge could determine if the lawsuit was still relevant. That's because Hecox had since withdrawn from the university after failing to qualify for the cross-country team.

In court documents filed last week, Hecox said she has since re-enrolled at the school and has arranged to join the Boise State women's club soccer team this spring. She's also training regularly in hopes of trying out for BSU's cross-country and track teams when the season opens next fall.

"Just as when she filed this lawsuit, Lindsay is a transgender woman enrolled at Boise State who plans to join a women's sports team there — something H.B. 500 forbids her from doing absent relief," her attorneys wrote. □

Associated Press

Biden order would make U.S. government carbon neutral by 2050

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden on Wednesday signed an executive order to make the federal government carbon-neutral by 2050, aiming for a 65% reduction in planet-warming greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 and an all-electric fleet of cars and trucks five years later.

The White House said the order shows how the government will "leverage its scale and procurement power to lead by example in tackling the climate crisis." The order will reduce emissions across federal operations, as part of a government-wide effort to confront climate change.

"As the single largest land owner, energy consumer and employer in the nation, the federal government can catalyze private-sector investment and expand the economy and American industry by transform-

ing how we build, buy and manage electricity, vehicles, buildings and other operations to be clean and sustainable," the order said. It directs that government buildings use 100% carbon pollution-free electricity by 2030; that the U.S. fleet of cars and trucks become all-electric by 2035; and that federal contracts for goods and services be carbon-free by 2050.

Government buildings should be carbon-free by 2045, including a 50% emissions cut by 2032, Biden said.

The executive action is a part of Biden's commitment to support the growth of clean energy and clean technology industries, while accelerating U.S. progress toward achieving a carbon pollution-free electricity sector by 2035, the White House said.

"The United States govern-

ment will lead by example to provide a strong foundation for American businesses to compete and win globally in the clean energy economy while creating well-paying, union jobs at home," the White House said.

Through the executive order, the government will transform its portfolio of 300,000 buildings, fleet of 600,000 cars and trucks and annual purchasing power of \$650 billion in goods and services to achieve net-zero emissions over the next three decades, the White House said.

The order should make federal agencies more resilient to the effects of climate change and increase the sustainability of supply chains, lessening future disruptions of and damage to federal operations, assets and programs, the White House said.



President Joe Biden talks with reporters at the White House in Washington, Wednesday, Dec. 8, 2021, during snow flurries, as heads to Missouri to promote the bipartisan infrastructure law.

Associated Press

On electricity, the White House said the government will work with utilities, developers, technology companies, financiers others to purchase electricity produced from sources that generate no carbon emissions, including solar and wind, for all its operations by 2030.

The move to zero-emission vehicles "will accelerate the advancement of America's industrial capacity to supply zero-emission vehicles and electric vehicle batteries and create and sustain good union jobs in manufacturing, engineering, and skilled-trades," the White House said. □

California plans to be abortion sanctuary if Roe overturned

By ADAM BEAM
Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP)

— With more than two dozen states poised to ban abortion if the U.S. Supreme Court gives them the OK next year, California clinics and their allies in the state Legislature on Wednesday revealed a plan to make the state a "sanctuary" for those seeking reproductive care, including possibly paying for travel, lodging and procedures for people from other states.

The California Future of Abortion Council, made up of more than 40 abortion providers and advocacy groups, released a list of 45 recommendations for the state to consider if the high court overturns Roe v. Wade — the 48-year-old decision that forbids states from outlawing abortion.

The recommendations are not just a liberal fantasy. Some of the state's most important policymakers helped write them, including Toni Atkins, the San Diego Democrat who leads the state Senate and attended multiple meetings. Democratic Gov. Gavin Newsom started the group himself and in an interview last week with The Associated Press said some of the report's details will be included in his budget proposal in January.

"We'll be a sanctuary," Newsom said, adding he's aware patients will likely



People rally in support of abortion rights at the state Capitol in Sacramento, Calif., May 21, 2019. Associated Press

travel to California from other states to seek abortions. "We are looking at ways to support that inevitability and looking at ways to expand our protections." California already pays for abortions for many low-income residents through the state's Medicaid program. And California is one of six states that require private insurance companies to cover abortions, although many patients still end up paying deductibles and co-payments.

But money won't be a problem for state-funded abor-

tion services for patients from other states. California's coffers have soared throughout the pandemic, fueling a record budget surplus this year. Next year, the state's independent Legislative Analyst's Office predicts California will have a surplus of about \$31 billion.

California's affiliates of Planned Parenthood, the nation's largest abortion provider, got a sneak preview of how people might seek abortions outside their home states this year when a Texas law that outlawed

abortion after six weeks of pregnancy was allowed to take effect. California clinics reported a slight increase in patients from Texas.

Now, California abortion providers are asking California to make it easier for those people to get to the state.

The report recommends funding — including public spending — to support patients seeking abortion for travel expenses such as gas, lodging, transportation and child care. It asks lawmakers to reimburse

abortion providers for services to those who can't afford to pay — including those who travel to California from other states whose income is low enough that they would qualify for state-funded abortions under Medicaid if they lived there.

It's unclear about how many people would come to California for abortions if Roe v. Wade is overturned. California does not collect or report abortion statistics. The Guttmacher Institute, a research group that supports abortion rights, said 132,680 abortions were performed in California in 2017, or about 15% of all abortions nationally. That number includes people from out of state as well as teenagers, who are not required to have their parents' permission for an abortion in California.

Planned Parenthood, which accounts for about half of California's abortion clinics, said it served 7,000 people from other states last year.

A huge influx of people from other states "will definitely destabilize the abortion provider network," said Fabiola Carrion, interim director for reproductive and sexual health at the national Health Law Program. She said out-of-state abortions would also likely be later term procedures, which are more complicated and expensive. □

Giant Christmas tree outside Fox News headquarters set afire



A worker disassembles a Christmas tree outside Fox News headquarters, in New York, Wednesday, Dec. 8, 2021.

Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — A man was charged with arson and other crimes Wednes-

day for setting fire to a 50-foot (15-meter) Christmas tree in front of Fox News

headquarters in midtown Manhattan, police said.

The artificial tree outside of the News Corp. building that houses Fox News, The Wall Street Journal and the New York Post caught fire shortly after midnight, police said.

Photos and videos from the scene show the fully decorated tree going up in flames.

Fox News host Shannon Bream announced the fire to viewers as firefighters were working to put it out.

"This is the Fox Square in New York, outside of Fox headquarters," Bream said.

"It appears that our giant Christmas tree there, just a couple of minutes ago, was completely engulfed in flames."

Firefighters extinguished the flames, and no injuries were reported.

A 49-year-old man who police said was homeless was arrested on charges including criminal mischief, arson and trespassing. It wasn't clear if he had an attorney who could comment on the charges.

Police said the man had a lighter, but it was unclear whether any accelerant was used.

The tree had been ceremonially lit during a network Christmas special on Sunday. Its charred remains were being dismantled Wednesday.

"We will not let this deliberate and brazen act of cowardice deter us," FOX News Media CEO Suzanne Scott told network staffers in a memo. Scott said a new tree would be installed "as a message that there can be peace, light and joy even during a dark moment like this."

A lighting ceremony will be held for the new tree, Scott said. □

Report: Chinese hackers targeted Southeast Asian nations

By DAVID RISING

BANGKOK (AP) — Chinese hackers, likely state-sponsored, have been broadly targeting government and private-sector organizations across Southeast Asia, including those closely involved with Beijing on infrastructure development projects, according to a report released Wednesday by a U.S.-based private cybersecurity company. Specific targets included the Thai prime minister's office and the Thai army, the Indonesian and Philippine navies, Vietnam's national assembly and the central office of its Communist Party, and Malaysia's Ministry of Defense, according to the Insikt Group, the threat research division of Massachusetts-based Recorded Future.

Insikt said it determined that the high-profile military and government organizations in Southeast Asia had been compromised over the last nine months by hackers using custom malware families such as FunnyDream and Chinoxy. Those custom tools are not publicly available and are used by multiple groups believed to be Chinese state-sponsored, the group said.

The targeting also aligns with the political and economic goals of the Chinese government, bolstering the suspicion it is state-spon-



Morning traffic moves in front of the main building of the Malaysia Prime Minister's office is seen in Putrajaya, Malaysia, Wednesday, Dec. 8, 2021.

Associated Press

sored, Insikt said.

"We believe this activity is highly likely to be a state actor as the observed long term targeted intrusions into high value government and political targets is consistent with cyberespionage activity, coupled with identified technical links to known Chinese state-sponsored activity," the company told The Associated Press.

China's Foreign Ministry did not immediately respond to a request for comment on the allegations.

In the past, Chinese authorities have consistently denied any form of state-

sponsored hacking, instead saying China itself is a major target of cyberattacks.

Of the cyber intrusions it tracked, Insikt Group said Malaysia, Indonesia and Vietnam were the top three targeted countries. Also targeted were Myanmar, the Philippines, Laos, Thailand, Singapore and Cambodia.

All countries were notified in October of the findings, though it is thought that at least some of the activity is ongoing, the company said.

"Throughout 2021, Insikt Group tracked a persistent cyber espionage cam-

paign targeting the prime minister's offices, military entities, and government departments of rival South China Sea claimants Vietnam, Malaysia, and the Philippines," the company said.

"Additional victims during the same period include organizations in Indonesia and Thailand."

Much of that campaign was attributed to a group being tracked under the temporary identifier of Threat Activity Group 16, or TAG-16, Insikt Group said.

"We also identified evidence suggesting that TAG-16 shares custom

capabilities with the (China's) People's Liberation Army-linked activity group RedFoxtrot," the group said.

Overall, Insikt Group said it had identified more than 400 unique servers in Southeast Asia communicating with malware, but it was not clear what information had been compromised.

"Many of the identified incidents spanned several months, so it is highly likely that the respective threat actors maintained long-term access to the victim networks and were able to obtain victim data over this time period in support of intelligence gathering efforts," Insikt told AP.

"At this time, we do not have insight into the specific data obtained by the threat actors."

Some of the information on Indonesia was disclosed in a previous report from the Insikt Group in September, and Indonesian authorities said at the time they had found no evidence their computers had been compromised.

Insikt Group said the earlier activity directed at Indonesia from malware servers operated by the "Mustang Panda" group gradually stopped in mid-August, following a second notification the company provided to the country's authorities.

□

Serbia moves to defuse protests over Rio Tinto lithium mine

BELGRADE, Serbia (AP) —

Trying to defuse large protests by environmentalists, Serbia's populist government decided Wednesday to suspend two key laws that would help mining giant Rio Tinto launch a lithium mine in western Serbia. For two consecutive weekends, thousands of protesters in Belgrade and other Serbian towns have blocked main roads and bridges to decry the planned lithium mine despite an intimidation campaign launched by authorities against the demonstrators. The protests are the

biggest challenge yet to the increasingly autocratic rule of President Aleksandar Vucic, who has denounced the road blockades as illegal and claimed they are being financed from abroad to destabilize the Balkan country.

Serbian environmental groups and civil society organizations are angry that Serbian authorities have lowered a referendum threshold on major projects in the country and written another law that would lead to the swift expropriation of private property near major construction

projects. Activists argue this would pave the way for Rio Tinto to quickly launch the lithium mine.

The Serbian government said in a statement Wednesday that the expropriation law will be withdrawn for further public discussion while the referendum law would be amended.

Protest organizers have also demanded that the government's financial deal with Rio Tinto be made public. The multinational company has pledged it will put \$2.4 billion into the Serbian lithium mine project.



Protesters stand on the highway during a protest in Belgrade, Serbia, Saturday, Dec. 4, 2021.

Associated Press

Throughout its almost 150-year history, Rio Tinto has faced accusations of corruption, environmental degradation and human rights abuses at its excavation sites.

Lithium, which is used in batteries for electric cars, is considered one of the most sought-after metals of the future as the world shifts to more renewable energy sources. □



Indian Army Chief Bipin Rawat speaks during a press conference in New Delhi, India, Jan. 12, 2018.

Associated Press

India's military chief, 12 others killed in helicopter crash

By **SHEIKH SAALIQ and ASHOK SHARMA**

NEW DELHI (AP) — India's military chief, Gen. Bipin Rawat, and 12 others were killed Wednesday in a helicopter crash in southern Tamil Nadu state, the air force said.

It said in a tweet that the helicopter "met with a tragic accident." The dead included Rawat's wife. The air force said one officer, Group Capt. Varun Singh, survived and is being treated in a military hospital.

The air force said the Russian-made Mi-17V5 helicopter was on its way from an air force base to the army defense services college when it crashed near the town of Coonoor, a hill station in Tamil Nadu. The reason for the crash was not immediately known. Television images from the crash site showed plumes of smoke billowing from the debris as local residents tried to put out the fire and remove bodies from the wreckage.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi said Rawat had contributed greatly to modernizing the country's armed forces. "His insights and perspectives on strategic matters were exceptional," Modi said.

Defense Minister Rajnath Singh said Rawat "served the country with exceptional courage and diligence." Archrival Pakistan's army chief, Gen. Qamar Javed Bajwa, expressed his con-

dolences on the "tragic death" of Rawat and his wife, its government said in a tweet.

The air force said an inquiry has been ordered into the accident.

Rawat, 63, was the most senior official in the Indian military and the first chief of defense staff, a position created by the government in 2019. He was also an adviser to the Defense Ministry.

His primary task was to overhaul the military, which has struggled to modernize and improve coordination among the army, navy and air force.

He previously served as chief of army staff and also commanded forces in Indian-controlled Kashmir and along the frontier with China. He was a veteran of counterinsurgency operations.

In 2015, Rawat oversaw Indian "surgical strikes" into neighboring Myanmar, when para-commandos entered the country to attack Naga rebels who had ambushed and killed Indian troops.

In 2017, he awarded a gallantry medal to an army officer who had tied a civilian to the front of his jeep in Kashmir, where rebels are fighting Indian rule. The incident sparked controversy within India and outside, with rights groups saying the officer used the man as a human shield against stone-throwing protesters. □

Germany-wide police raids target alleged worker trafficking



Federal police officers raid an apartment building in the Hohen-schonhausen district, in Bremen, Germany, Wednesday, Dec. 8, 2021.

Associated Press

By **KIRSTEN GRIESHABER**

BERLIN (AP) — German police and customs officers conducted dozens of raids across the country Wednesday and arrested at least nine people in a crackdown on the alleged human trafficking of temporary workers from outside the European Union.

Federal police in Berlin tweeted that the raids started at 7 a.m. local time (0800GMT). The po-

lice agency said officers searched homes and businesses, focusing on the German capital and surrounding Brandenburg state but also locations in Bremen and Lower Saxony states.

Authorities said they were investigating around 20 suspects for suspected involvement in allegedly forging EU citizenship documents and placing the workers, most of them from

Ukraine and Moldova, with large logistics companies.

The federal police and prosecutors said that more than 2,200 police and customs officers were involved in the raids coordinated and led by the general prosecutor's office of Berlin.

Among the people arrested were eight men between the ages of 32 and 62, and a 42-year-old woman. The names of the suspects and the companies where the workers were assigned were not released in line with German privacy rules.

Authorities are investigating on suspected charges of trafficking foreigners, forgery of documents, organized illicit work and illegal employment.

The suspects allegedly operated a network of temporary employment agencies in the Baltics and in Germany, including dummy companies, according to federal police in Berlin. □

Israel announces completion of security barrier around Gaza



An Israeli soldier stands guard during a ceremony opening the newly completed underground barrier along the Israel-Gaza border, Tuesday, Dec. 7, 2021.

Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Israel on Tuesday announced the completion of an enhanced security barrier around the Gaza Strip designed to prevent militants from sneaking into the country.

The 65-kilometer (40-mile) barrier includes radar systems, maritime sensors and a network of underground

sensors to detect militant tunnels. Existing fencing was replaced with a 6-meter (6.5-yard) high "smart fence" with sensors and cameras.

Israel has fought four wars with Hamas since the Islamic militant group seized power in Gaza nearly 15 years ago, most recently in May. During a 2014

war, Palestinian militants tunneled into Israel and clashed with Israeli troops.

Defense Minister Benny Gantz announced the completion of the barrier after more than three years of construction, saying it places an "iron wall" between Hamas and residents of southern Israel.

During May's fighting, Hamas used a sophisticated tunnel system within Gaza but did not infiltrate fighters into Israel. The group fired more than 4,000 rockets at Israel in 11 days, with large volleys that occasionally overwhelmed Israel's sophisticated missile defenses.

Israel carried out hundreds of airstrikes during the conflict and brought down several multistory buildings. The war killed over 250 people in Gaza, including at least 129 civilians, according to the U.N., while 13 people died on the Israeli side. □

Study: Guatemala's tortilla industry depends on girls' labor

By SONIA PÉREZ D.

Associated Press

GUATEMALA CITY (AP) —

For millions of Guatemalan families handmade corn tortillas are indispensable with every meal, but many of those tortillas pass through the hands of girls and young women from impoverished families who work extraordinarily hours seven days a week.

Few if any are paid the official minimum wage, and some are paid nothing at all. They usually have no time to study and already face discrimination as Indigenous women from rural villages, so tortilla shops become dead-end jobs.

Those are among the findings of a study by the Pan American Development Foundation, a branch of the Organization of American States, that surveyed conditions in 292 tortilla shops in Guatemala City and four other cities across the country.

The conditions in the emblematic shops are a sort of microcosm of the hardships that face many in Guatemala, a nation where the rural poverty rate is near 75%, nearly 1 million children or adolescents are in the labor force and many Indigenous youths migrate to the cities seeking money



Florinda, 20, from the El Quiché department makes hand-made corn tortillas near La Palmita market in Guatemala City, Saturday, Oct. 16, 2021.

Associated Press

to help their families.

The report found people 20 or younger a few as young as 10 working at 160 of the tortilla shops, and based its findings on interviews with 92 of them.

Most of those young workers identified as Indigenous Maya and 52 said they were under the age of 18, though it added that some others appeared to be younger than the age they reported.

The long work days, low wages and poor conditions

in tortilla shops are "devastating" for youths, the study said. Roughly 60% reported working seven days a week. A similar percentage said they worked more than 11 hours a day around a blazing griddle in what are often tiny shops where they sleep as well as work, their beds hidden behind sheets hung from the ceiling.

None reported making Guatemala's minimum wage of about \$360 a month. Some said they

earned as little as \$65 a month, and some apparently those working for their families were paid nothing at all.

Sandra Alvarado works in a relative's tortilla shop with her daughter María Elena. Alvarado said María Elena is 18 — the legal working age — though she looked far younger. Both sleep at the shop — which is common for workers who have migrated from the countryside.

"We make 40 quetzales

each per day (about \$8 together), it's good money," Alvarado said.

They work from 5 a.m. to 8 p.m. "We work here because there's no other job, just this," she said. "That's life."

María Elena said only that she doesn't want to study and would rather work to help her family.

Florinda de la Cruz, a 20-year-old from northern Guatemala's Quiché province, also said that despite the heat, she preferred the tortilla shop to alternatives such as cleaning houses. "There, they don't let you rest, you are always working. My hands hurt, but this is better," she said.

The predominance of women in the shops is part of a gender division that starts early. Boys go out to work in the fields and girls stay home to help around the house, which traditionally includes making tortillas.

It takes about a minute to grab a small ball of masa, the corn flour dough, roll it into a ball and flatten it to a round tortilla. Then they are cooked on a griddle, known as a comal. While there are some industrial tortilla makers, most Guatemalans prefer the fresh, handmade tortillas. □

Chile's congress approves same-sex marriages, adoptions

By EVA VERGARA

Associated Press

SANTIAGO, Chile (AP) —

Both houses of Chile's congress voted Tuesday to approve a marriage equality bill that also includes authorization for adoptions by same-sex couples.

The initiative was approved first by the Senate on a 21-8 vote, with three abstentions, and shortly afterward by the Chamber of Deputies with 82 votes in favor, 20 against and two abstentions. After the vote in the chamber, several deputies hugged, including some from opposing parties.

The measure now goes to President Sebastián Piñera, who supported the bill, and will enter into force 90 days after its publication in the

official gazette.

Senators initially approved the marriage equality measure July 21 and deputies did so Nov. 23, but modifications introduced by the deputies required a joint committee of both houses to resolve their differences. Among the changes agreed to Monday is the recognition in Chile of marriages of same-sex couples performed abroad and the definition of marriage as "a solemn contract between two people" rather than between a man and a woman.

Center-left Sen. Yasna Provoste said that when the right to marry and found a family is recognized, "this recognition applies to all people without distinction

of sex."

The proposal had stalled in the Senate for four years, until Piñera gave it his strong backing last January, surprising everyone because he had long argued that marriage was between a man and a woman.

For Juan Pablo Durán and Juan Carlos Rodríguez, the approval came late because they were legally united at the end of November under the Common Union Agreement, which since 2015 has regulated legal aspects of same-sex unions such as inheritance, but does not rule on adoptions.

Durán said the pair now plan to be formally married once the new measure goes into effect.

He said they have no plans to adopt a child, but added: "It is not a completely closed issue. To be able

to give a chance in life to those who don't have any would be an honor and joy." □



Members of the Movement for Homosexual Integration and Liberation celebrate after lawmakers approved legislation legalizing marriage and adoption by same-sex couples, in Santiago, Chile, Tuesday, Dec. 7, 2021.

Associated Press

Time to invest: Premium condominium and house prices in Aruba are going up

EAGLE BEACH — Alberto Perret Gentil is the VP International Operations for the Pering Group, a 70 year old real estate development company with 20 years already in Aruba and four exclusive projects under their belt, all with beautiful ocean views and great amenities: Oceania Residences, Blue, Azure Beach Residences and Harbour House.

We catch up with Gentil inspecting the final details on the construction of The Villas at Azure Beach Residences.



We hear construction prices are increasing. What is your take?

"Construction costs have increased in the last year close to 28% for various reasons. Mainly factories closed worldwide due to Covid and caused a disruption in the supply chain with port capacity constraints in China among other places. The increase in materials and labor; steel

prices through the roof due to lower production, trade wars, Canada not exporting wood to the US, less labor available given the subsidies and more restriction in immigration and a very long process etcetera.

Also because of higher demand for goods as people stayed home during the pandemic without going out and spending on enter-

tainment/restaurants and thus have more disposable income to buy stuff. Just to give you an idea; a container from China now costs \$22,000 vs \$5,500 previously. And on top, import duties in Aruba include the (increased) freight cost in its calculation (CIF value)."

Are these costs reflected in the condominium and house sales prices?

"Not yet but will sooner than later. After a market analysis of construction costs and behavior of condominium prices in the Caribbean and the US it is clear to me sales prices will increase shortly. Why?

Historically prices in Aruba have been 15% lower than Brickell-Miami; now they are 40% lower, and that gap will eventually close. In South Florida there are many factors for this price hike; people moving from NYC and California, low interest rates, better climate, the trend of a flexible workplace with the possibilities opened by the likes of Zoom and Google Meet, Blackstone and others, private equity funds buying residential real estate, higher construction costs, Latin Americans moving in driven away from socialist/communist regimes and so on.

And many of these factors should and will affect Aruba real estate prices as well. Workation and the trend of flexible workplaces is certainly one of them more so with 14 daily flights from/to the US. Aruba is safe, has the best infrastructure in the Caribbean and a much better climate and beaches than for example South Florida. By the way, not many people know this, but Aruba has the best internet in the Caribbean.

- Covid pretty much under control.
- A lot of outdoor space to roam around and with a great and sunny weather.
- Construction costs are already 25%-30% higher and sales prices have not adjusted (yet).
- Resale of Inventory by Venezuelans that bought as a weekend getaway eager to sell as they emigrated given the political circumstances will be reduced in this coming winter season.
- Very few oceanfront lands left for new condo developments and a moratorium for new condos in place. A simple equation of supply and demand."

What are you doing about it?

"Unfortunately for us we have very little inventory left for sale but will certainly increase prices as other developers are already doing. Pre- Covid prices are history.

We see another clear trend on longer stays, a high demand for premium houses and villas that are selling like crazy as people want to remain private (only one left at The Villas – Azure Beach Residences). Also, for townhouses with private pools, ground floor units and Pent Houses with the possibility of turning one room into an office. Contrary to my previous belief I even think there is room for oceanfront multi-million-dollar houses. Build them and those super rich will come. In the case of Harbour House we created a Co-Working space with all the services that has been a hit among buyers as even though they want to work from afar in their dream destination they want to socialize, have a good coffee and a quiet place to work away from the family running around in their condo."

Any final advice?

"Hurry up!! Look for experienced developers with a good track record. Take advantage of the low interest rates and remember that investing in real estate is all about location, location, location; stay close to the Ocean."

For any questions you can always contact:

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Exploring the Mainstreet of San Nicolas, the Sunrise City

SAN NICOLAS— At Just 11 miles southeast from Oranjestad you will enter the city San Nicolas, also known as Sunrise City or Chocolate City. A city that is rich in authentic culture and island charm. San Nicolas is Aruba's second largest city and was once a bustling company town dominated by the oil industry since the early 1930's.

Over the course of four decades, its demographics had changed immensely due to a stream of Afro-Caribbean and South American workers who came to fill the jobs in the oil refinery between the 1920's until the 1960's. To this day traces of the multicultural influences in culinary offerings and customs, housing and population are clearly visible in San Nicolas - more than anywhere else on the island.

Flow of history

If you are looking for history San Nicolas has it. Here you will find three amazing museums, The Museum of Industry, the Community Museum and the Carnival Eupho-

ria, all within walking distance from one another.

The Museum of Industry is situated in the Water Tower in San Nicolas and narrates Aruba's industrial history which began in the 19th century. Here you will learn about gold, aloe, phosphate, oil and the tourism industries which made San Nicolas once a bustling business center. Experience the touching stories of those who were part of this history.

Nicolaas Store built in 1940 and renovated in 2014 is the home of the Community Museum. The collection is remarkable and spans millennia. Ancient fossils stand next to tableaus of an authentically recreated colonial kitchen and bedroom and 19th-century barbershop, just to name a few of the items of old-time Aruba that has been preserved. A collection of artifacts and other objects of artistic, cultural, historical, or scientific importance can be found here for the purpose of education or enjoyment.

The new San Nicolas

In the shadow of the refinery, an art capital is quietly beginning to grow. This is the new San Nicolas, a place that is starting to become a magnet for all that is young, cool and hip in Aruba. Indeed, San Nicolas has all of the ingredients of an emerging cultural hub — varied history, interesting architecture, and, perhaps most importantly, an urban layout that makes it walkable. As you walk around, the streets are silent but the walls are loud, filled with bright, colorful murals painted by a collection of artists from around the world. Thanks to the efforts of various art organizations in Aruba, such as Art



Rules Aruba and Aruba Art Fair, San Nicolas has had quite the aesthetic makeover with regards to vibrant street art. Each year more and more stunning murals are replacing broken down buildings with colorful art pieces that keep brightening up SunriseCity.

Must See, Do, Buy & Eat

A little bit of everything can be found in the main street. Stores selling shoes, clothing, jewelry you

name it. Arts & crafts by Artisa, a design store in which you can immerse yourself in discovering genuine and locally made arts and crafts which reflect the diversification of the Aruban craft heritage and the artistic supply of artisans. Don't miss out on trying the exquisite food offered by the cafes and restaurants or just enjoy a peaceful walk admiring the murals, mosaic benches and all the history San Nicolas has to offer. □



Further tightening of monetary policy: increase in the reserve requirement

ORANJESTAD — On October 14, 2021, the Monetary Policy Committee of the Central Bank of Aruba decided to further increase the reserve requirement by 1 percentage point (i.e., from 10.0 percent to 11.0 percent) as of the 1st of November 2021. Hereof, the following information and monetary policy analysis was considered:

1. Benchmarks to monitor and maintain foreign exchange reserve adequacy

To maintain monetary stability and safeguard the fixed exchange rate between the Aruban florin and the US dollar, adequate foreign exchange reserve buffers are essential. The Centrale Bank van Aruba (CBA) utilizes two key benchmarks to monitor and assure adequate levels of reserves: the International Monetary Fund (IMF) Assessing Reserve Adequacy (ARA) metric and the current account (CA) coverage ratio.

International reserves are defined as the sum of official reserves under management by the CBA in addition to the foreign exchange reserves managed by local commercial banks. In general, official reserves are defined as external assets that are: (i) readily available to and controlled by central banks for meeting balance of payments financing needs, (ii) serve as a basis for foreign borrowing and (iii) for maintaining confidence in the (domestic) currency and the economy. More importantly, due to our fixed exchange rate that is pegged to the US dollar, official and international reserves serve to maintain the value of the Aruban florin at a fixed level. Consequently, adequate reserves are of critical importance for maintaining monetary and financial stability.

The level of official reserves held by the CBA is considered to be suitable when it is between 100 and 150 percent of the IMF ARA



metric. This reserve adequacy metric measures the level of official reserves by benchmarking this against a weighted average of multiple monetary and financial factors. These include broad money, intercompany lending, short and long-term debt, and export of goods and services. Meanwhile, the current account coverage ratio measures the number of months of current account (CA) payments covered by the international reserves and considers the level of international reserves to be proper when it exceeds the traditional benchmark of 3 months of CA payments.

2. Recent Monetary Developments

During the first three (3) quarters of 2021, both official and international reserves remained well above the benchmarks used, and, therefore, have proven to be resilient. Specifically, official reserves (including the revaluation differences of gold and foreign exchange holdings), up to and including the 24th of September 2021, widened by Afl. 340.8 million in comparison to end-December 2020. Additionally, international reserves expanded by Afl. 566.7 million in the same period, due to the mentioned official reserves expansion and an Afl. 236.1 million rise in foreign exchange reserves of the commercial banks. The observed growth in the official and international reserves was primarily the result of the short-term loans for liquidity purposes provided by the Dutch government to the government

of Aruba, as well as higher inflows related to tourism, which picked up substantially since the second quarter of 2021.

The level of the official and international reserves stood at, respectively, Afl. 2,548.7 million and Afl. 2,923.3 million on the 24th of September 2021. Accordingly, the IMF ARA metric stood at 121.0 percent as per the end of September 2021, while the CA coverage ratio was calculated at 9.3 months. Thus, at the end of said month, both metrics remained well above the monitored thresholds.

3. Inflation remained trending upwards in August 2021

In August 2021, the CPI index rose by 1.4 percent compared to a year earlier. On balance, this was mainly driven by an increase in gasoline prices, which is part of the transport component of the CPI (the transport component contributed with 1.5 percentage points to the total inflation). Likewise, the component of housing contributed with 0.3 percentage point to the total inflation in August 2021. The latter was mostly the result of increased prices for maintenance and repair of dwellings, and likely driven by the increases in (import) prices of construction, renovation, and maintenance materials. The predicted end-of-period inflation is calculated at 1.9 percent by the end of December 2021 and is foreseen to contract to 1.6 percent by the end of 2022.

The twelve-month average inflation has followed

an increasing trend since April 2021. Consequently, at the end of August 2021, the twelve-month average inflation rate stood at -1.1 percent compared to the lowest point of -2.3 percent registered in April 2021. It is expected that the twelve-month average inflation will accelerate to 0.5 percent by the end of December 2021 and is expected to continue to increase in 2022.

4. Upward trend in commercial banks' excess liquidity combined with contracting commercial banks' credit

The excess liquidity of the commercial banks continued its upward trajectory in August 2021, reaching Afl. 1,580.3 million compared to Afl. 1,107.4 million registered in December 2020. In general, excess liquidity has been trending upwards since the first quarter of 2020, mainly as a result of the reductions in the reserve requirement and the minimum prudential liquidity ratios as of March and April 2020, forming part of the monetary and prudential policy relief measures to mitigate the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Moreover, another contributing factor to the continued increase in commercial banks' excess liquidity is the relatively muted demand for credit. Specifically, overall commercial bank credit contracted by 2.2 percent in August 2021 compared to December 2020. The downward movement was mainly caused by declines in business loans (-3.5 percent) and loans to individuals (-1.8 percent). Although

an uptick in housing mortgages (+0.2 percent) and in the category 'other' (+0.5 percent) was noted, these were, however, insufficient to offset reductions in the other loan components. The weak demand for commercial bank credit and its subsequent impact on the level of excess liquidity in the commercial banking sector is also likely due to the continued financial support to businesses by the government of Aruba. This is reflected in demand deposits held by businesses, as it increased by 14.1 percent in August 2021 compared to December 2020.

Anticipated outflows due to de-escalation initiatives by the CBA

Despite the comfortable level of official and international reserves, the CBA anticipates an increase in foreign exchange payments as a result of the lifting, as per September 2021, of the previously introduced foreign exchange restrictions. The latest forecasts show a total of Afl. 261.8 million to flow out by the end of 2021.

5. Monetary Policy Committee decision on reserve requirement

Considering the ample excess liquidity in the commercial banking sector, the projected uptick in inflation, the continued economic recovery, as well as the anticipated increase in foreign exchange outflows, the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) of the CBA decided during its meeting of September 14, 2021, to expand the reserve requirement from 9.0 percent to 10.0 percent effective on October 1, 2021 (Graph 3). Motivated by the rising excess liquidity at the commercial banks and the expected outflows related to the full de-escalation of the foreign exchange restrictions, the MPC determined during its meeting on October 14, 2021, to increase the reserve requirement further by 1 percentage point (i.e., from 10.0 percent to 11.0 percent) as of the 1st of November 2021. □

Avoid going overboard and over budget on kids' holiday gifts

By **AMANDA BARROSO** of NerdWallet

It's hard to resist the holiday messaging to buy gifts and lots of them to make the season brighter and more fulfilling.

However, supply chain disruptions may make this year's shopping stressful, especially for parents looking to buy toys in short supply. Shortages aside, going overboard on gifts for your kids could create budget stress and unintentionally set unrealistic expectations for years to come.

This year's added pressures could offer parents a chance to rethink their holiday shopping and budget strategies. These tips from budgeting and parenting experts can help you cut through the noise and find what works for your family.

SET YOUR HOLIDAY BUDGET

A budget is crucial to keeping spending in check. If you're struggling to figure out a realistic holiday budget, review previous years' spending.

"You can literally pull up your credit card statements from last November and December if you want to get a general sense of where your money went," says Andrea Woroch, a money-saving expert focusing on advice for mothers. Contemplate whether



Stuffed toys are on sale at a Woow Store in the American Dream shopping mall in East Rutherford, N.J., Dec. 4, 2021.

you want to repeat that spending pattern or if it left you stressed when January rolled around.

Budgets change from year to year. "Things can change in a year dramatically," Woroch says. "Did you have another kid? Did you get divorced or married, bought a house, get a new job, lost your job? Whatever it is, you kind of have to reassess based on your current situation."

TAKE INVENTORY AND GET ORGANIZED

Things get lost in overflowing toy boxes. Taking inventory of what you already

have is a great way to figure out what your kids need and an opportunity to set aside items they've outgrown.

Items in good condition can be donated or sold in online marketplaces to other parents looking to catch a deal.

KEEP TRACK OF EARLY PURCHASES

Gifts bought weeks or even months ago may have fallen off your radar especially if you've hidden them well. Before hitting the stores, make a list of previous purchases.

"If you're not writing down

what you bought, you're going to forget what you had," says Woroch, who suggests using an app called Santa's Bag although a note on your phone or old-fashioned pen and paper can work just as well. Tracking purchases throughout the season can help prevent overspending.

FIND A GIFTING STRATEGY THAT WORKS EVERY YEAR

"Something they want, something they need, something to wear, and something to read" is a popular phrase, and for good reason: It sets pa-

rameters on gift-giving and works no matter how old the child.

Another strategy is buying fewer toys and focusing on what supports your child's development, which is especially important for younger children. Kathryn Humphreys, an assistant professor in Vanderbilt University's Department of Psychology and Human Development, suggests finding toys that allow collaboration and open-ended play.

"Fewer well-selected toys is likely better than a large number of toys that would be difficult for the child to keep track of through a busy day of present opening," she said in an email. "I find with my own kids that anything over two to three presents is quickly forgotten given that Christmas is already quite exciting."

SPEND ON EXPERIENCES THAT LAST ALL YEAR

Woroch suggests purchasing a subscription box for kids for a "gift that keeps on giving" after the holidays are over. There are tons of options for kids that deliver everything from art projects, Montessori toys and diverse books each month. Some of these services might be running holiday promotions, so be on the lookout for a deal. □

Zuckerberg, Chan to invest up to \$3.4B for science advances

By **HALELUYA HADERO**

The company that runs the philanthropy of Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg and his wife, Priscilla Chan, is investing up to \$3.4 billion to advance human health over 10 to 15 years, according to a spokesperson for the organization.

The Chan Zuckerberg Initiative, or CZI, announced Tuesday its new effort is aiming to "observe, measure, and analyze any biological process throughout the human body across spatial scales and in real time."

The philanthropy, which has a mission of curing, preventing or managing all disease by the end of the century, said in its an-

nouncement that it will focus its science work over the next 10 years on developing new research, institutes and technologies that can help its mission.

Jeff MacGregor, a CZI spokesperson, said \$500 million will be given to establish an institute at Harvard University that focuses on artificial intelligence. The institute, which will get the funding over the next 15 years, will be named after Karen Kempner Zuckerberg, Zuckerberg's mother. MacGregor said \$600 to 900 million will go towards a new biomedical imaging institute at CZI. Another \$1 billion will be given to the Chan Zuckerberg Biohub Network, a new initiative

that seeks to bring together scientific institutions to pursue "grand scientific challenges."

A separate \$800 million to \$1 billion will be given over 10 years to the Chan Zuckerberg Biohub, which aims to develop technologies that treat disease.

Zuckerberg's other company, Facebook, recently changed its name and logo, rebranding itself Meta Platforms Inc.

The announcement of the rebranding came amid heightened legislative and regulatory scrutiny of Facebook in many parts of the world because of the Facebook Papers, the internal documents that fueled criticism about the harm the



Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg and his wife Priscilla Chan arrive at the 7th annual Breakthrough Prize Ceremony at the NASA Ames Research Center on Sunday, Nov. 4, 2018, in Mountain View, Calif.

Associated Press

company's products are causing to society. Zucker-

berg has largely dismissed the furor as being unfair. □

CROSSWORD

By THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS 45 Invites

1 Church service

5 — Christi

11 Massage target

12 Anxious feeling

13 Steel ingredient

14 Feel bad for

15 Indian capital

17 Director Burton

18 Miniature map

22 Knee, e.g.

24 Lively dance

25 Radius setting

26 Crew need

27 Turns suddenly

30 Risqué

32 Useful skill

33 Many a time

34 Madrid miss

38 On the go

41 Turkey neighbor

42 Blues-based music

43 Mint product

44 Swindled

DOWN

1 Big pipe

2 Lot unit

3 Movie listing info

4 Mail, as payment

5 Area

under a wave

6 Kind of musical

wonder

7 King of "Watchmen"

8 Hole number

9 Try out

10 Match part

16 CPR pro

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J	E	T	L	A	G	S	U	M	O
A	V	I	A	T	E	E	T	O	N
G	A	N	G	E	S	A	S	K	S

Yesterday's answer

19 Winter driving

need

20 Old oath

21 Conserva-

tive, in London

22 Coffee, slangily

23 Metal sources

28 Quit

29 Wonder of music

30 Scary shout

31 Kalahari setting

35 Require

36 Refinery sight

37 Crumb carriers

38 Jackson 5 hit

39 Pigeon sound

40 Load unit

1	2	3	4		5	6	7	8	9	10
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42							43			
44							45			

12-9

AXYDLBAAXR
is LONGFELLOW

One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

12-9

CRYPTOQUOTE

M Y R Y F S B T M B Y A M U
U C V X L V H N V L T M T K U Z L U
A M H V L L U C V S B T M B T K K S T
Q Z B U A K V Z M U C V Z K C V T F
R V G Y K V U C V S Q T Z M U Z U .

— B H T A F V X Y M V U

Yesterday's Cryptoquote: KIDS SHOULD PRACTICE AUTOGRAPHING BASEBALLS. THIS IS A SKILL THAT'S OFTEN OVERLOOKED IN LITTLE LEAGUE. — TUG MCGRAW

Test feeding plan in works for starving Florida manatees



In this Dec. 28, 2010, file photo, a group of manatees are in a canal where discharge from a nearby Florida Power & Light plant warms the water in Fort Lauderdale, Fla.

Associated Press

By CURT ANDERSON

Associated Press

St. PETERSBURG, Fla. (AP)

— Normally giving food to wild animals is considered off limits, but the dire situation in Florida with more than 1,000 manatees dying from starvation due to manmade pollution is leading officials to consider an unprecedented feeding plan.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and state environmental officials intend to unveil a limited proposal this week to feed the beloved marine mammals in one specific Florida location to test how it works. This is not usually done with any wild animal, but the situation has become such an emergency that it has to be considered, said Save The Manatee Club Executive Director Patrick Rose. The club was co-founded in 1981 by Florida troubadour Jimmy Buffet and former governor and U.S. Sen. Bob Graham.

"It's the entire ecosystem that is affected by this and will be affected for a de-

cade to come," Rose said in an interview Tuesday. "This is a necessary stopgap measure. It is a problem created by man and man is going to have to solve it." A Fish and Wildlife Service spokesman said in an email that the agency "does have approval to move forward on a limited feeding trial" but that details are not yet finalized. A formal announcement is expected later this week. The emerging plan would involve feeding manatees at a Florida Power & Light plant in Cape Canaveral, along the Indian River Lagoon on the east coast where manatees congregate in cold winter months because of the warm water discharge from the plant. It would be an experiment involving lettuce, cabbage, and other greens delivered in a controlled manner such as via a conveyor belt, Rose said.

People would not be authorized to simply start tossing lettuce into a Florida bay some place.

"Under no circumstances

do we want people feeding manatees. It's illegal, and remains so," Rose said. Manatees have long struggled to survive with humans. Hundreds of the slow-moving animals are struck every year by boats, which has led to no-wake manatee zones throughout Florida with violations punishable by significant fines. But the starvation threat has led to a record 1,017 manatee deaths as of Nov. 19, according to state figures.

As winter looms, even in Florida, another bad year is expected.

This has been caused mainly by runoff from farms, urban areas and sewage that promotes growth of blue-green algae and other harmful organisms. It chokes off light needed by seagrass, eliminating the main food source for manatees. Climate change that worsens the algae blooms is also a factor.

And it's not just manatees. People's health can be affected by the algae blooms along with the health of a wide range of aquatic creatures, from crabs to dolphins. Aside from protecting the animals, there is an economic loss for boat captains, sightseeing tours and others who flock to Florida for the chance to see these creatures.

"Literally, saving manatees is part of saving the ecosystem. If we can get this taken care of, manatees will flourish. If we don't, they won't," Rose said. "We are in the most critical position." Manatees were listed as endangered for years by the federal government, but in 2017 their numbers appeared to have rebounded enough — officials say there are between 7,000 and 8,000 animals in Florida — that their status was downgraded to threatened. Several Florida politicians, including Republican U.S. Rep. Vern Buchanan, have been pushing to restore the endangered status which brings more attention and resources to them. □

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Eagle beach
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24 weeks remain on each
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31 weeks remain \$7 K
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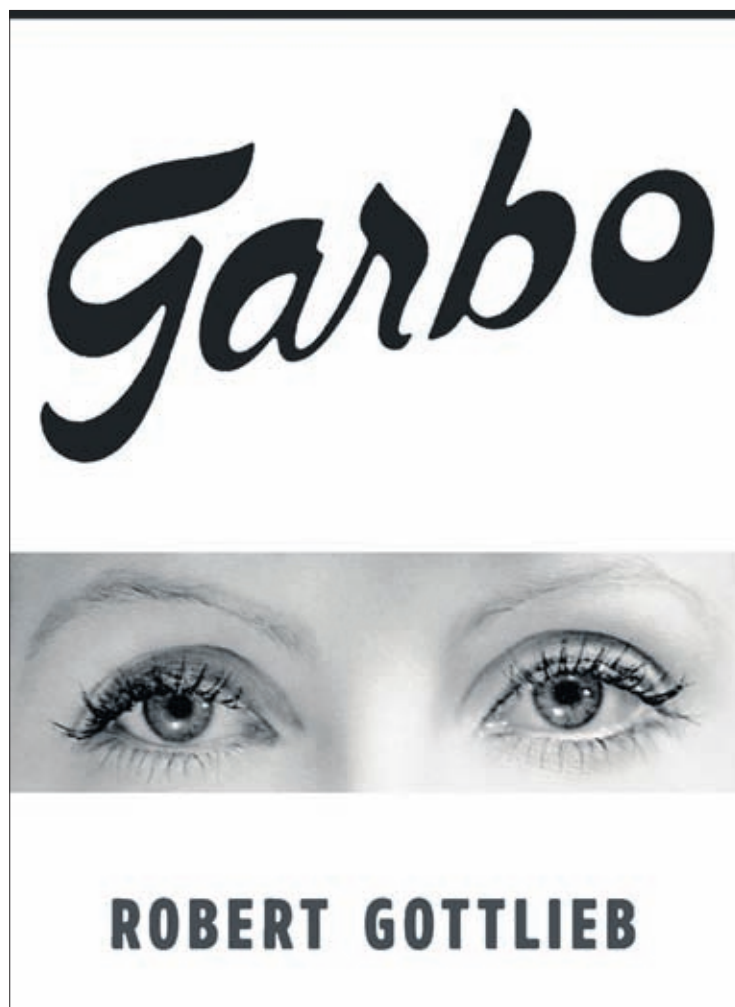
Review: 'Garbo' a mesmerizing look at film's greatest enigma

By **DOUGLASS K. DANIEL**

Coming a century after the Swedish actress' film debut, Robert Gottlieb's biography of Greta Garbo is a classic movie lover's dream. Enriching his insightful reconsideration of Garbo's life and career are wonderful photos, a selection of essays from the past, and anecdotes from those who encountered the enigmatic star.

It's just the kind of book the famously private Garbo would have hated — and read — every page. As Gottlieb explains, her desire for privacy did not make her immune to interest in what people were saying about her. But friends who talked to writers or, worse, wrote their own books about her would be erased from her life.

Why care about Garbo today? After all, her movies are rarely seen outside of TCM. She appeared in three European feature films, then just 25 films in Hollywood, all for MGM and



This cover image released by Farrar, Straus and Giroux shows "Garbo" by Robert Gottlieb.

Associated Press

nearly half of them silent. She more or less walked away from her career in 1941 yet retained a grip on the public's imagination up to her death, at 84, in 1990. Gottlieb, a longtime book editor and publishing executive as well as a writer and critic, presents an early 20th century life with all the trappings of a season of TV's "Feud." In Garbo's case, however, the quarrel was not with a bitter rival (Marlene Dietrich may have come closest, if only in her own mind) but with Garbo herself. Greta Gustafsson endured the humiliations of poverty growing up in Stockholm but found little joy or comfort in the millions she earned in Hollywood as Garbo. She longed to be an actress, putting on shows as a child, and worked tirelessly to gain a place in the theater. Yet with film stardom in the U.S. came the heavy chains of contract work and never-ending demands on her time. In "Grand Hotel" (1932)

Garbo famously lamented, "I want to be alone," but in real life she was no recluse, just a woman who no longer wanted to be in the public eye. Photographers pursued her throughout her five decades of retirement. She loved children but never had her own. She had plenty of men in her life — and more than a few women — but never married. (One suitor claimed she had an inability to love.) She diminished the beauty that entranced moviegoers with slacks and sweaters that could have used a good washing. People who met her often commented on how little she offered in the way of interesting conversation — likely shyness combined with a lack of education beyond her early teens — yet she laughed more than one might expect.

Garbo's parsimony was as legendary as her beauty. New York shop owners knew her more as a browser than a buyer. □

Museum to fix 'ripples' in Rembrandt's 'Night Watch'



View of Rembrandt's biggest painting the Night Watch showing the ripple in the painting in the top left corner, in Amsterdam, Netherlands, Wednesday, June 23, 2021.

Associated Press

By **MIKE CORDER**

THE HAGUE, Netherlands (AP) — Rembrandt van Rijn's iconic painting "The Night Watch" will be restretched to get rid of deformations in its top left corner, the Netherlands' national museum announced Wednesday.

The 379.5x453.5-centimeter (149.4x178.5-inch) canvas will be removed from its wooden stretcher next month and placed on a new one to remove rippling that was caused when the world famous painting was housed in a temporary gallery while the Rijksmuseum

underwent major renovations from 2003-2013.

The oil on canvas painting depicts an Amsterdam civil militia and shows off Rembrandt's renowned use of light and composition to create a dynamic scene filled with characters.

The museum said the ripples were likely caused by "excessive climatic fluctuations in the gallery" where it hung during the rebuilding work on its landmark home in Amsterdam.

"We feel this is very important to do to for the long term preservation of the painting. The deformation (is) then expected to relax and the painting then will assume a flatter, more even surface," said Petria Noble, the museum's head of paintings conservation.

The painting has undergone many restorations over its lifetime. It was placed on its present wooden stretcher in 1975. Once the painting has been restretched, the museum will decide on whether further restoration

work is needed.

The announcement came as the museum rounded off a long and minutely detailed scrutiny of the painting using a battery of high-tech imaging technology, including scans that revealed a preparatory sketch of the work underneath the paint.

"It gives us the feeling we can peek over Rembrandt's shoulder while he was working on 'The Night Watch,'" said Pieter Roelofs, the museum's head of paintings and sculpture.

Experts had long suspected that Rembrandt sketched the work before painting it in 1642. Now they have the proof.

"This gives us real insight into Rembrandt's creative process for the first time. It is fascinating to see how he's searched for the right composition," Roelofs said. "We've discovered the origins of 'The Night Watch.'" The museum said that much of the painting remains in excellent condi-

tion, while some areas are "in poor repair, partly as a result of the many treatments 'The Night Watch' has undergone since the 17th century." It added that past removal of varnish likely led to paint dissolving on parts of the work.

The Dutch government announced Wednesday that it plans to buy another Rembrandt masterpiece, "The Standard Bearer," from a private collection in France.

The ministry for education, culture and science sent a budget amendment to parliament seeking lawmakers' backing to spend 150 million euros (\$169 million) on the painting, which would hang near "The Night Watch" at the Rijksmuseum. The country's Rembrandt Association will also help fund the purchase with a donation of 15 million euros (\$16.9 million) and the Rijksmuseum Fund will add 10 million euros (\$11.2 million), the ministry said in a statement. □

Cheryl Reeve new USA Basketball women's national team coach

By DOUG FEINBERG
AP Basketball Writer

USA Basketball didn't have to look far for its next women's coach, turning to Cheryl Reeve.

The Minnesota Lynx coach and general manager has been an assistant on the last two Olympic teams. Now she's taking over the U.S. women's national team.

"What I've learned with working with Cheryl and getting to know her over several years is that when you get Cheryl involved, you get all of her," USA Basketball CEO Jim Tooley said. "She's engaged. She's committed, and her passion and enthusiasm are contagious."

She will be the first professional women's basketball coach to lead the team since Anne Donovan was court-side for the 2008 Beijing Olympics. UConn's Geno Auriemma was the coach for the 2012 and 2016 Games. South Carolina's Dawn Staley led the Americans to a seventh consecutive gold medal at the Tokyo Olympics this past summer.

"I am incredibly humbled and excited to be named



Team USA coach Cheryl Reeve talks to the team during a timeout in the third quarter of an exhibition women's basketball game against Stanford, Saturday, Nov. 2, 2019, in Stanford, Calif.

Associated Press

head coach of the USA Basketball Women's National Team, one of the greatest dynasties in sports," Reeve said. "I have enjoyed an incredible journey with USA Basketball since joining in 2014 and look forward to what lies ahead as we seek more gold for the USA. I am indebted to the USA Basketball Board of Directors, Dawn Staley, Geno

Auriemma, and of course, my Lynx family who have positioned me for this prestigious opportunity."

Reeve has won four WNBA championships with Minnesota.

"I think what we've done for many years has been really successful. It will serve me well to listen to what has worked," Reeve said. "From a coaching stand point,

what I witnessed is that coaches have to come in and be themselves. I've had good fortune to be around that and see what does and doesn't work."

The U.S. is in a bit of transition with five-time Olympic gold medalist Sue Bird retiring from international play. Her backcourt partner for all those gold medals, Diana Taurasi, hasn't decid-

ed whether she will keep playing for USA Basketball or retire as well.

Four-time Olympic gold medalist Sylvia Fowles, who plays for Reeve in Minnesota, also said she is retiring from USA Basketball. The Americans still will have a dominant interior presence with Brittney Griner, A'ja Wilson and Breanna Stewart. Reeve knows there's a wealth of talent in the U.S. team pool.

"I think with the start of a new quad it means a fresh look at the pool for the committee," Reeve said. "I'll have a list of people from my experiences with USAB and the WNBA."

Each time you do this, the pool starts over. That will be interesting. There are a lot of good players in the WNBA regardless of position."

Reeve's first major international event will be the World Cup next fall in Australia. The Americans earned an automatic berth by winning the Olympics.

The U.S. will host a four-team qualifying tournament for the World Cup in February that includes Russia, Belgium and Puerto Rico. □

7-time champion Serena Williams won't play Australian Open

MELBOURNE, Australia (AP)

— Not long after Serena Williams' name was absent from the entry list for the Australian Open, she confirmed the obvious: the seven-time champion won't play the 2022 edition of the season-opening major in January.

The 40-year-old Williams hasn't played since retiring from her first-round match at Wimbledon with a right hamstring injury and her ranking has slipped to No. 41. She won the last of her 23 Grand Slam singles titles at the 2017 Australian Open, and was beaten in the semifinals this year by Naomi Osaka in straight sets. The Australian Open's website Wednesday said the seven-time women's singles champion would not compete in Melbourne "following advice from her

medical team."

"While this is never an easy decision to make, I am not where I need to be physically to compete," Williams told the website. "Melbourne is one of my favorite cities to visit and I look forward to playing at the AO every year. I will miss seeing the fans, but am excited to return and compete at my highest level."

Novak Djokovic was on the men's entry list at No. 1 in a further indication that he'll be playing at Melbourne Park beginning Jan. 17 despite Australia's strict regulations requiring all players, officials and fans to be fully vaccinated for COVID-19. Djokovic has declined to comment on his vaccination status in recent months, although he was included last week on the Serbian team for the ATP

Cup which starts Jan. 1 in Sydney.

The nine-time Australian Open champion is tied with Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal for the men's record of 20 Grand Slam singles titles. Nadal is also entered for the Australian Open, which starts Jan. 17, but Federer is skipping the tournament as he continues his recovery from surgery.

Daniil Medvedev, who ended Djokovic's bid for a calendar-year Grand Slam with a victory in the U.S. Open final, Alexander Zverev, Stefanos Tsitsipas and Andrey Rublev are listed above No. 6 Nadal, who is not playing for Spain at the ATP Cup.

Ash Barty tops the women's entry list and will continue her quest to end a long drought for Australian women at the tournament.



United States' Serena Williams makes a forehand return to compatriot Danielle Collins during a tuneup event ahead of the Australian Open tennis championships in Melbourne, Australia, Friday, Feb. 5, 2021.

Associated Press

No Australian woman has won the singles title since Chris O'Neil in 1978.

On Monday, Bianca Andreescu, the 2019 U.S.

Open champion, said she will take a mental break from tennis and sit out the start of next season, including the Australian Open. □

Woods to make return from car crash at PNC Championship

By **DOUG FERGUSON**

Ten months after his right leg was badly damaged in a car crash, Tiger Woods is returning to competition next week with 12-year-old son Charlie in the PNC Championship.

"Although it's been a long and challenging year, I am very excited to close it out by competing in the PNC Championship with my son Charlie," Woods tweeted. "I'm playing as a Dad and couldn't be more excited and proud."

It will be his first competition, even in a tournament Woods described last week as the "hit-and-giggle" variety that he can play, since he and his son tied for seventh a year ago in the unofficial event that pairs family members.



Tiger Woods watches his shot during a training session at the Albany Golf Club, in New Providence, Bahamas, Sunday, Dec. 5, 2021.

Associated Press

The tournament was holding a spot for Woods, and he fueled speculation he might play the Dec. 18-19 event at the Ritz Carlton Golf Club Orlando when he took full swings with driver on Saturday and Sunday

during his Hero World Challenge in the Bahamas.

"We have been liaising with Tiger and his team for some time and are delighted that he has now decided to make his return to competitive golf at the

PNC Championship," said Alastair Johnston of IMG, the executive chairman of the event.

Woods was driving to a Los Angeles course for a television shoot on Feb. 23 when police say he was driving about 85 mph along a winding, coastal suburban road. The SUV crashed through a median and plunged down a hill.

Doctors said he shattered the tibia and fibula bones in his right leg in multiple locations. Those were stabilized by a rod in the tibia. A combination of screws and pins were used to stabilize additional injuries in the ankle and foot.

Woods said last week that amputation was considered. He declined to discuss specifics of the crash,

saying only "you can read about all that there in the police report."

The PNC Championship was formerly known as the Father-Son Challenge until it changed the title to be more inclusive of family members. For the first time in its 24 years, the tournament has a current No. 1 player in the field, Nelly Korda, who will be playing with her father Petr, a former Australian Open tennis champion.

Lee Trevino is playing again and has never missed the tournament since it began in 1995. Justin Thomas returns as the defending champion with his father, Mike, a longtime PGA professional.

Still, this becomes all about Woods inside the ropes, hitting shots that count toward a score. A year ago, it was his last event before a fifth back surgery, not as serious as the previous ones. Toward the end of the second round, he was not hitting some tee shots because his son played from a forward tee and was getting it out there farther than Woods could have hit it.

Fans are returning to the Florida course, and it already is close to a sellout because organizers limit ticket sales to preserve the intimate nature of the event.

The next question will be when Woods, who shares the career PGA Tour record with 82 victories, will play in an official event.

He had said last week that was a long way off, dousing hopes of a return by suggesting his leg wouldn't allow him to practice as much, he was at peace with that and "I've made the climb enough times." He also said he hadn't reached a point of deciding whether to complete a full comeback from his latest injuries.

"I'll play a round here or there, a little hit and giggle, I can do something like that," he said. "To see some of my shots fall out of the sky a lot shorter than they used to is a little eye-opening, but at least I'm able to do it again. □

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